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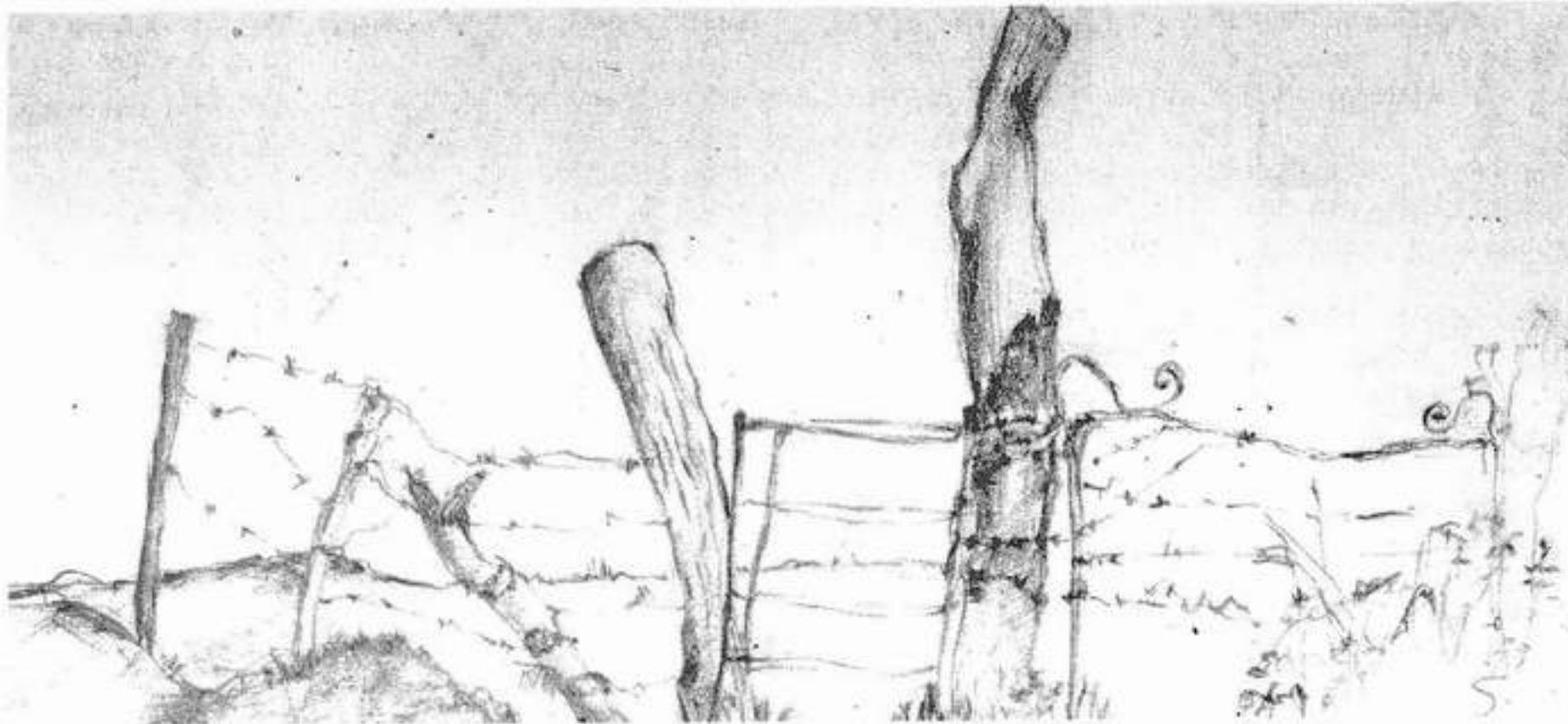
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THE
VOICE
OF THE
WORKER

'That which is good for the working class I esteem patriotic . . .'
James Connolly

THE PARK DANES



SOCIALIST
LABOUR
PARTY



MATT MERRIGAN

poems



DESMOND O'GRADY

BILE, BEEF AND CARROTS

COINCIDENT with the Intermediate and Leaving Cert exams in the Republic and the 'O' and 'A' levels exams in Northern Ireland I have devised a set of simple questions for the loyal readership of this journal and indeed for outsiders, clerical and lay. Gey your pencils ready! *Question 1:* Which country is the more christian – the 95 per cent nominally Catholic Republic of Ireland or the 95 per cent reputedly pagan United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland – and how can you tell? *Answer:* The Republic. Because the Government has just given the people a first birthday present of true christian, i.e. spartan, living through the medium of an extra 3p on the loaf, 1p on milk, 7p on butter and an extra £3.50 a week for those buying on mortgage overpriced McNerney/Gallagher/Brennan & McGowan concrete block accomodation units. *Question 2:* Which party now seeking funds by means of a National Collection declares in its literature that it has been 'active in bringing about stability in prices'? *Answer:* (Full marks to all students who refrained from scribbling obscenities. 'Get stuffed' is not regarded as obscene. 'Up Dev' wins bonus points). But the answer? – there is no answer – that is the answer.

Because of commotion at the back of the hall I'm taking a break to give you some religious instruction. My text is The Sermon on the Beef Mountain. As you will have read in your good, clean, wholesome, Irish Catholic newspapers the Republic has in cold store 80,000 tons of beef, the south col you might say of the EEC mountain. A scheme to distribute some of the mountain before it topples (really because the EEC is running out of refrigerated storage space) was put up by an expense-account Brussels sprout; he offered the stuff at giveaway prices so long as it was kept off the main consumer outlets; it was O.K. to give it to old people in hospitals and institutions and to orphanages. Britain with its utterly unchristian outlook jumped at the chance and through the aegis of its Agriculture Minister, John Silkin (a Jew), arranged to distribute umpteen tons to pensioners and children in care, not even excepting delinquents. Obviously a dirty British plot.

The stand taken by the Republic was quite different (good on you, Jack); a spokesman for the Department of Agriculture in Dublin said: 'There has been no demand here for the introduction of a cheap beef scheme. Apart from that, we do not want to have state interference in routine commercial practices.' There will then be no free or cheap beef for our pensioners and our orphans. But, of course, our pensioners have infinitely greater opportunities for saying their beads and being cared for by religious or Legionaires of Mary than their counterparts in non-christian England; 'not on bread (or beef) alone doth man live' and as for the orphans, early spartan training will make 'em hardy. No beef, but plenty of carrots just as for donkeys.

You have heard of the 'unacceptable face of capitalism' so now which country, the Irish Republic or the UK, offers capitalism at its ugliest? Oh, don't bother answering. Isn't it obvious that those Brits show greater compassion for the old, the weak and the unprotected – yes, in Northern Ireland too – than 'Catholic' republicans? It all goes to show, as my colleague John Casey pointed out last month, that there is no future, only a bloody one and a hungry one, for the Irish people while our affairs are in the hands of Catholic nationalists.

FIANNA FAIL, you say, abolished rates. Not so; they abolished half the rates; the other lot had already abolished half. Fianna Fail did indeed abolish the Road Tax. Yes, on a majority of family cars – and less £5 registration fee. For people buying houses on mortgage the new, higher rate of interest more than wipes out the half-rates concession; after that, those lucky people start to pay more for everything they eat. Are they a penny better off? No worse off. Dearer interest

BY BARNOT MCBVOY

for cars on h.p. more than makes up for the reduction in Road Tax and then there is the much increased insurance. Let us not forget the people who are still paying rent and who have no cars; their fares also and their children's fares to and from school were savagely increased. *Fianna Fail has slaughtered the poor in order to help the already well-to-do* – the farmer, the speculative builder, the grant-aided hotelier, the industrialist (no Wealth Tax).

And there has not been a whimper of protest from the local press (if you can dignify an advertisement sheet like the *Leader* by putting it in that category) or local pulpit (is there a christian church in Limerick?; there is, we know, a 'Brits Out' bishop). Just one small thing more out of many I could quote: the £1,000 grant to first-time house buyers. Another trick o' the loop job; the spec builder has long since put up his asking price to make sure he cops that; moreover, the grant is payable only when the buyer can get a certificate of 'reasonable value' and what good is that for a four-walled box of cracked concrete and unseasoned wood? So you're better off, are you? Well as the Duke of Wellington said to the man who called him 'Mr. Smith', 'if you believe that, you'll believe anything'. Try simple arithmetic and you'll fined out.

WILL this catalogue of crime make any difference to the way the people vote next time round? Extremely unlikely, because the distinguishing marks of a large section of the Irish people at home or abroad are Ignorance and Indolence, the results of indoctrination from the cradle to the grave in a special brand of reliogisity and an ultra-nationalism that sees everything 'Irish' as good when it is the reverse, and an educational system, when it can be afforded, that is targeted entirely at the passing of exams, the acquisition of a degree, a process in which simple civics and humanism has no part. I have in this column referred to Fianna Fail as 'a criminal conspiracy against the people'; nothing that has happened in the year to this June since it was returned to office has caused me to change my mind.

What's Jack doing in all this? He was last heard of preaching disarmament to Gromyko, Carter and that happy warrior Valery Giscard d'Estaing who is so fond of his black slaves that when they cry out for bread or a fair price for their minerals he gives them instead that greater boon, French nationality. Everyone at the UN likes Jack who's always good at sending a battalion of Irish troops to foreign places. 'Jack's the Boy' is the toast of Beekman Towers (that's the apartment block next to the UN, an air-conditioned nightmare where your poor scribe was a guest at 100 dollars a day and grub yourself. My apartment had everything including a dish-washer; well, almost everything; there was no kettle to brew the morning cuppa but, of course, Jack and Maureen may well prefer Dom Perignon). When you are paying that 3p more for your loaf you will bear in mind that it is all in a good cause – Jack is keeping up your appearances abroad and Maureen is now buying her own jewellery, not letting an oil mogul pick up the tab, as on a previous foreign trip.

THIS journal has always supported family planning as a basic civil and human right. We felt that it would help individuals in the short term, the nation in the long term. Well, the all-party opposition prevailed in the main and the result, as we

predicted, is a population bulge of unmanageable proportions. The solution, as offered to Prof. Tussing in the latest report, is the abolition of free post-primary education from Intermediate Cert. onwards and of State-funding of Third-Level education. In other words, education for the well-heeled rather than for the most talented. According to the Professor, there is no other possible way to deal with the child explosion; otherwise taxation for education would be unbearable. He envisages scholarships for bright children whose parents are poor. But, of course, the scholarships will be few, a token, a sop to Cerberus; as for the rest of those bright children they'll be lost to the nation, their places taken by dim-witted children whose parents have a money qualification. This is not just an outrage against the very poor (they are used to being discriminated against); it is a crime also against the children of the high wage-earner and the middle-income salaried class; none of them will be able to afford post-primary education.

Will the Professor's commissioned report be adopted? You bet it will, despite noises to the contrary; it *has* to be adopted while the government ethic is Fianna Fail or Fine Gael; money and the care of property is their motivation; their children will be all right Jack; not that their children's winning of scarce education will benefit the polity, but won't they pass muster as tooth-pullers, pill-peddlers, straight-up-and-down and Spanish-bungalow architects, shyster lawyers, supermarketees, Golden Vale graziers, the whole gallimaufry that makes up Eire Nua? What about the poor? Well, what about them — here let me return to the Sermon on the Beef Mountain — the poor must stay meek because the meek shall inherit the earth — if

the rest of you agree'. Paddy Lane's lot will give you the earth all right — a lump of it straight in your kisser, you rotten scrounger! Cry, the malignant country!

Advice? Yes, any parent who has a child of school age should take steps now to send that child to England. Not for his material welfare alone; the child is in obvious moral danger if he continues to be brought up in this environment, to Walk The Barrett Way is to tread on dung.

There is a hope, a small hope but it could grow, that the single, the married, the family man will take five minutes a day off just to ponder the socialist message. We preach humanity; we ask you to share our scorn for private wealth amidst public squalor (words, which Bishop Newman will tell you Sallust put in the mouth of Cato to describe the state of Rome . . . 'publice egestas privatium opulentia') and to resolve this day to give socialism a trial. Like that one-stripe British soldier, the lance-corporal, we are all local, acting, unpaid, we have only your axe to grind.

MY NEXT sermon will have a German flavour; I'm off to Munich to stay with a friend. Naturally, I shall pay my respects to Hitler in the beer-hall where capitalist money set him off on a bloody career that cost 50 million lives. And why not, didn't De Valera call on the German Ambassador in Dublin to express the nation's regrets when Hitler joined the Niebelungen? If I boast of this, I may well get a free beer — in the face! *Auf wiedersehen*.

SOCIALIST LABOUR PARTY

PART TWO

"In its political philosophy, if one can call it that, Irish Republicanism bears no relation to any kind of social democracy or socialism that I know of", said Dr. Noel Browne in a widely-reported recent speech. But what kind of party does Dr. Browne think he is Parliamentary spokesman for? In fact the Socialist Labour Party commits itself by its constitution to the full traditional programme of Irish Republicanism with all its narrow fanaticism and conservatism.

"The Socialist Labour Party commits itself to securing a withdrawal of the British presence in all its forms from the 32 counties of Ireland, including the withdrawal of British troops from the 6 North-Eastern counties of Ireland". This is the traditional programme of Irish Republicanism expressed in the most extreme form possible, in a form more extreme than many other Republicans would accept. It is interesting to consider some of its implications.

The organisation of British-based unions in Ireland is undeniably one of the forms of the British presence here. Republicans have always taken particular objection to this form of the British presence, and periodically launched attacks on it — precisely because it is one of the most popular forms. It follows from the SLP Constitution that Matt Merrigan, chairman of the SLP, is bound to campaign for the withdrawal of the Amalgamated Transport and General Workers Union, of which he is secretary, given that it is a British-based union and therefore a form of the British presence in Ireland. Either the SLP is being utterly hypocritical in professing this fanatical Republican aim, or else provisions like these were railroaded through by a fanatical minority within its ranks, without the general membership being aware of what they implied.

Another implication of this policy must be considered. A million people in Northern Ireland demand that the province should retain its political link with Britain, and explicitly consider themselves British. What are they but a human form of the British presence in Ireland? Is the SLP prepared to maintain, as certain extreme Republicans are, that if these people do not abandon their pro-British attitudes they must be physically removed from Ireland along with other forms of the British presence? (And if so, how does it propose to do the impossible?)

In another of its constitutional 'commitments' the SLP draws back from its extremism, and contradicts what it has already given commitment to. "It shall seek to achieve the unification of the working class throughout the entire island as a essential part of the struggle for a United Socialist Ireland". This is only a piece of humbug. The struggle for a United Ireland of any kind separate from Britain is a certain cause of division between Ulster Protestant workers and Catholic workers. "A United Socialist Ireland" only means Eire Nua in its latest disguise. If socialism is really what is at issue, there is no reason whatever why workers from the majority community in Ulster should fight for a United Socialist Ireland rather than for a Socialist Britain.

Socialists Against Nationalism is a pressure group which exists to oppose nationalism and promote class politics, in the Republic of Ireland. Its members believe that the ruinous effects of nationalism on the working class and socialist movement throughout Ireland are there for all who wish to see them. They demand that the Government of the Republic recognise as legitimate the present constitutional status of Northern Ireland. To this end they demand that Articles 2 and 3 of the Republic's Constitution, which lay claim to the territory of Northern Ireland, be dropped. They oppose the call for the British Government to declare its intent to withdraw from Northern Ireland. If this were done the most likely outcome would be general civil war.

All socialist organisations and individuals who agree with the aims of the campaign against nationalism are invited to take part in its activities. Information about Socialists Against Nationalism can be got by writing to: Socialists Against Nationalism, 105 Sillogue Road, Dublin II.

This article is a reprint of a leaflet which was distributed to all those who attended the Social Labour Party's policy conference in Dublin on May 27th. The leaflet was handed out by members of "Socialists Against Nationalism" and marked the first public activity by this new group, formed only a few weeks previously.

SÚRAS OF THE V

PROLOGUE:

And, out of the light's agony,
leaving behind all past destruction,
let's lie us down again on that old bed
steadfast under the bamboo and seaweed ceiling
opening glad white arms to one another.

Then let me tell you all that story
that's the skill of survival in the daily struggle—
the blows given, the beatings taken —
of wandering for years, of wins and losses
in the search not to end a destroyer.

While I watch over you, let down
your long hair to shadow your shoulders
before sleep; for all this place shall break
and fall apart should you go absent.

THE GREAT HORSE FAIR

Crouched on their women woven saddle rugs,
heated in parley,
the Chieftains hold Council
at our annual Great Horse Fair.

Taller than rooftrees
each Chieftain's standard
at the place of assembly.
Curved the great felt tents,
richly embroidered at sunrise.
Deft the design of the dyed thread
with intricate needlework.
Like the morning sky's stars before dawn
the bonfires burn by the tent mouths.
In thousands the handcarved
bright daubed covered wagons
ring the camp site.
Untackled,
their upright shafts forest the morning.
Throng of our tribesmen;
with free speech for each free man
at the Chief's deliberations.

Sheepswool the cloak of the Horsemaster
tossed back off scaled armour;
gold-mounted the leather
scabbards his longsword.
Beside him his helmet of bronze squares,
plumed ermine
mounted on red felt.

Tethered the ponies,
their posts driven upright
in rich red earth:
palominos and piebalds,
chestnuts and bays, sorrels and roans.
Harness on racks by pegged tent flaps:
embossed leather saddle work,
broad saddle cloths of appliquéd felt stuff
sweeps the ground with bright tassels.
Silver studded chestband, bridle,
snaffle—bit, cheek bars —

links of red quartz, green onyx, blue topaz.

Regal their longhaired tall women:
blend blue eyed, ravenhead olive eyed,
green eyed redhead;
handwoven bright plaid shawls on their shoulders
against dawn's chill,
gold thread woven in the plaits of their hair.
Silver flash of hammered marriage bracelets
each one her own man's handspan broad on the forearm,
slender snake bracelets
coiled round bare biceps;
finger rings, earrings and throatbands of goldwork,
embossed leather belts at the waist
with mounted precious medallions.
Rawhide the sandals
and studded with silver their soft leather anklets.
And the Chieftains in Council . . .

"Now that they've lost their grasslands
they're pushing in from the east on our pasture.
We're overgrazing twice yearly.
No wonder our grass is failing.
Thieving herds in the ploughlands,
destroy the young grain crop.
Herdsman and homesteaders at each other's throats.
Refugees and old mercenaries
returned from the wars in the mountains
stake claim to lands we've long redivided.
We're too many people with too many herds.
Both growing yearly. We're overpopulated
and everyone's squabbling over too little land."

"There's only one obvious solution:
Some of us have to move out.
The question is where?"

The south is a military block.
East we're outnumbered. North
there's nothing but forest and swamp;
no grazing for horses and cattle.

That was the year
we shoved out west
on our general journey . . .

FROM WANDERING CELT

THE IRISH ANTHOLOGY SÚRA

Rome emasculates Europe.
All native language, vernacular literature lost.
Nothing their own again in France or Germany until eleven
hundred.
Irish Christianity not direct from Rome but Gaul through
Britain.

National the emphasis.
As with translation
the new renews.

The national oral memory written out in Gaelic —
while Europe's put to the barbarian sword —
in that "quiet habitation of sanctity and learning":
Northumbrian monks learned from that.
Hence Beowulf.

WRITING OUT OF DOORS:

"The forests' masts tower round about
All manner of bird flies in and out
the blackbirds' song sounds glad.
while I write in my shade.

That cuckoo calls my hours and quarters.
He too wears a hood.
Protect me Lord, all Saints and Martyrs
to write well in my greenwood."

Three hundred years of humanism.
Enough to save, revitalise through mission,
a war exhausted West.

THE POET'S REQUEST

"I ask
for a house
a small safe place,
not a hovel
for pigs and cattle;
wide open
with dignity in welcome
and a chair
well cushioned with horschair
at my desk."

THE POET AND HIS DOG

"We pair work alone out here together
day after day in every kind of weather.

His job's to guard the kitchen from wild cats,
mine's to daily make my manuscripts.

More than town, or talk in public places,
I prefer the silence of my houses's
study. He, wrapped round my feet, keeps both
us warm. And, because well fed, he's worth
his keep because he keeps those thieving cats
out of the larder of our common eats.

by
Desmond O'Grady



PHOTOGRAPH TAKEN BY THE SWEDISH POET,
PETER CURMAN.

He sometimes growls in sleep about his dreams
while I am plotting literary schemes.

We both get on with what we must each day
which kills the joke of this life's unfair play.

He's master of his trade, devoted worker.
I'm pledged for life to mine and want no other."

Then one Spring
The Viking . . .

"Tonight the sea wind's high
the wave's tip white spray;
tonight no fear of those who sail
the straight of our Irish channel."

THE WAGES OF FEAR

by
JOHN LENIHAN

It was the poorest and most remote parish in the diocese and newly ordained priests were usually sent there as curates. This priest was straight from Maynooth. He claimed to be six feet and to weigh 14 stone and boasted about both. He wasn't long in the place when he began to make himself felt. A major renovation was begun on the curate's residence which was indeed in bad repair but, considering the state of houses in the parish at the time, was much superior to the vast majority of the others. His was a two-storey, slate, building, detached, with a garage and a large garden back and front. It was rumoured that he had an electric blanket; this was a subject of great discussion and speculation. None in the place had ever seen or had the faintest notion of how an electric blanket worked. Electrification had just been introduced to what was then a backward community and there were some who refused the 'electric city' as some old man called it.

There were not many cars in the parish and the cars that were were old battered Fords or Morrises. Models that dated themselves even if they were carefully washed, polished and serviced. The priest had a V.W. beetle and he changed this every few years. After repairing and redecorating his house, there was a weekly call for money from the pulpit. There were church-door and door-to-door collections and card games. The card game was his idea and twenty years afterwards it continued to be used as a means of collecting for the church or allied causes. Parishioners organized card games, supplying food: ham sandwiches, barm-brack, tea, that kind of meal. The neighbours paid to take part in the game and a money prize was given to the outright winner. There was a great interest locally in '31 or 41' and these card games became very popular. Also a competitive element was introduced as neighbour vied with neighbour in competing for the largest pot for God and the Church. It was a symbol of a family's standing, the sum of money collected for the Church, and also an indication of their popularity. This competitiveness was used to generate great fervour in organizing and running card games and filling the curate's coffers.

In the fifties it was a backward place — most people had not travelled further than Limerick, then a provincial town called a city. Some had not ventured beyond the 4 or 5 market towns within a 15-mile radius. Those of them that went to the local pub were less shy than those who didn't. Some of them, bachelors living alone or with aged parents, led furtive frightened lives. If they had suits they were old-fashioned or shabby or threadbare. So they came to Mass in shabby clothes or with wellingtons and trousers smelling of creamery milk and cowdung. The priest ruled supreme in the Church. The pulpit was his throne and he lambasted, abused, threatened and scolded them each Sunday. One time around Christmas a decent poor man in the mountains, the father of 12 children, amongst whom were some attractive daughters, decided to hold a Wran party in his house. The holy man declared him a whore-master, his house a brothel, and threatened hell's fires on all those who attended. One local wit was asked if he were going and when he replied that he was, it was put to him that the priest might turn him into a goat: "By Jaysus, if he does," says he, "I'll ate every head of cabbage in his garden."

The parishioners offended his reverence, as he was know to the old ladies, in two ways: they stood around the door and porch and they left the church before Mass was over. The fellows who stood around the door had their reasons; some were badly dressed; others were shy and nervous about appearing in public; more were old and in indifferent health, and the remainder had no interest in the proceedings but came to eye the girls, pink pebbles at the headstones and exchange lewd jokes. Their presence at the door drove the priest into a frenzy. It was a regular occurrence, one at least every month, indeed many believed that the prospect of a show was the reason why some stood around the front door. He followed a

regular pattern. He began to read Mass but usually stopped before reaching the epistle. First he drew attention to those at the door and reminded all and sundry of how many times he had asked them to move up the chapel. He then formally asked them to 'come up the church; there are plenty of seats'. At this point some of the faint-hearted, hangers-on, and the adolescent 'hardmen' began to move up. He waited. The hard-core stood examining their boots, the timber of the door, the stained-glass windows. Now he began to shout and threaten that he was coming down. They gazed more intently at floor, ceiling of windows. Shouting, thumping the alter, and sometimes the alter boys, he threw his vestments across the altar rails and strode fuming down the aisle. The girl-spotters and jokers outside the door took to their heels at this point racing through headstones and tombs out of the church precincts to the more pleasant atmosphere of a pub adjoining the graveyard. Some of those remaining were hard-working labourers and small farmers who refused to leave their chosen place or to give in to his bullying. They would stand through his tirade quietly examining church furniture until he exhausted his own patience. Sometimes a hothead, a once-off character, would reply and stomp out and this would give him some satisfaction as he steamed up to the altar. Generally he ranted and raved to stony faces, reducing himself to an apoplectic state and members of the congregation to silent chuckles and smiles.

His second pre-occupation in the church was with people leaving Mass before it was over and pushing at the church door. There were always a few characters who enjoyed nothing better than a good shoving and pushing match, as the congregation left, sending people reeling in all directions. Sometimes it had a sexual undertone allowing them to pinch some young one's backside in the melee. The priest would dash around from the sacristy to the sidedoor and berate, usually somebody who had been rammed out the door by 3 or 4 black-guards invisible at the rear. One day a quiet hill-farmer, a man who was never known to raise his voice in anger, found himself being pushed headlong out the door. "Oh you ould scoundrel and blackguard — why can't you leave the church like a Christian?" said the priest. The man was first taken aback, then became angry and launched himself at the clergyman in a frenzy of anger that sometimes is characteristic of quiet people. Whereupon the curate took to his heels, chasuble flying in the wind, to the safety of the sacristy. At other times when there was horse-play amongst those about the door, he would go down to the church gate after Mass and say: "I'm six feet and I weigh 14 stone and I'll take on any man here". Generally this was received in silence; you couldn't strike a priest-you'd die roaring if you did. And because it was tolerated, he made a habit of parading in this provocative fashion past the men smoking at the church gate and offering them out to fight. This however ended one morning when a wild mountainy fellow who had never shown respect for man, God or the devil said: "By God, father, if you'll take off the collar I'll take you on".

His second major theatre was the courting circle. There was a dancehall at the end of the village near the parochial house where dances were held on Sunday night. It was quite a success really, on Sunday afternoons mountainy men, faces soaped and red, hair Brylcreemed, suits carefully pressed, arrived in the early evening on big Ridges and Raleighs. Many of them were quiet fellows, confirmed bachelors who drank a few mediums of stout, smoked woodbines, bought a bag of

bulls eyes or chocolate sweets and went to the dance to fantasize the last few hours of a hard week. There were others, wild fighting men who came to settle scores with some other feuding family. In some of these an ashplant, an iron bar or knife could be used. Then there were those who came for the real business: to get a girl for the night. It was this group that the priest persecuted, searching them out in turf sheds, door porches, haybarns, wherever a little loving could blossom. Even though the priest with the blackthorn stick had become a caricature, he sometimes did carry it, although generally he went about just with a large battery torch, shining the light of the church on natural human desire. Generally there was a scampering or an apology; sometimes angry words, sharp retorts, and sulky refusals. Nobody at that time had ever heard of the sexual jealousy of celibates but some people understood his problem and they saw how he looked at the young women of the place. Some of those he hunted and haunted in their lovemaking emigrated to England and never returned.

The parish priest was a quiet gentle soul who lapsed into dotage occasionally and spent most of his life reading from a vast collection of dusty religious books and tracts. He kept to his section of the parish, crossing over for a funeral or a marriage, so that the other half of the parish was left to his reverence. Some believed that the old man didn't feel up to the curate and this would hardly have surprised anyone. He was a formidable character. Since the parish priest had opted out of dealing with affairs generally in the curate's half of the parish, visiting the local school and examining the children in Christian Doctrine fell to the curate. There was a tartar of a lady teacher in the school who at the worst of times was more than a match for him but apart from her he had a free run and he terrorised the school children. Frequently the sins of the parents were visited and those who were not remarkable for their religiosity or piety had their omissions visited on their children.

Sometimes he took to elocution lessons, teaching the

THE PARK DANES (continued from Page 8)

wax and wash. . . .

Then she awoke. The first thing she saw was the face of the corpse beside her there in the bed. She was slammed into suspended silence for a moment. Then she broke. She screamed. She screamed and screamed and screamed in shock and terror.

By the time they calmed her hysterics she was deaf. And deaf she stayed for; the rest of her life – although we called for a bodhaire ui Laoghaire – one who heard only what she wanted to hear!

During the funerals the men formed a guard of honour at each side of the cortege, with each man wearing his ribbon and medal of the Confraternity. Strict rules were laid down governing the itinerary of the cortege. All funerals, starting off north of a long narrow winding boreen, known as the "Funeral Road", that runs down to the Shannon through the water meadows of Lanahrone, had to proceed to St. Patrick's Church via Rosary Road, Corbally, Athlunkard Street and Clare Street. The Funeral Road is still in use. In winter it is muddy and almost impassable, but a warm summer reveals a well cobbled thoroughfare which once provided a vital link between Park and the Shannon. All funerals south of the road travel to the church by the shorter route across the canal and through Pennywell Lane. Both customs are still fervently preserved, much to the chagrin of the undertakers.

The people clung to an old-fashioned style of dress long after it had been discarded elsewhere. The women wore black shawls over long black dresses and aprons. The voluminous skirts, beloved of Queen Victoria, continued to be worn by Park women when their fellow townswomen had changed to the ankle-revealing tailored skirts which had become fashionable at the time of the Suffragette movement. The long dresses were edged with a black, velvet band and were romantic to view but totally unsuited to work in a vegetable garden or a cow-stall. The velvet edging quickly became mutilated as a result of trailing around through damp fields and muddy roads.

children how to say 'devil' instead of 'divil', 'better' instead of 'betther', not to say 'buther', and so on. Failure to pronounce correctly was often followed by a clip on the ear and it was all such a waste of time; the children had been brought up with the sounds of Gaelic ringing in their ears, the language of the district and English but the pronunciation and idioms owed more to the Gaelic than to the English language and was spoken accordingly. He himself was a product of the area and his spoken English, allowing for his term in Maynooth, approximated to the speech of the locals. Some of the people were extremely poor and from the time when a child was able to work the parents put him to work on their own or on a neighbour's farm on a casual basis. Under the compulsory education act children were obliged to attend school until they had reached the age of 14 or passed through sixth class, but the school's attendance officer took a lenient view of chronic absenteeism; he was a kind-hearted guard who usually said to a regular absentee: "Will you come to school in future?"

"I will guard"

"I hope so. I hope so".

The 'I hope so' was so much a part of the ritual that he was nick-named 'I hope so' and there was a break in the monotony of the day when 'I hope so' came to the school.

The priest broke the monotony too but this was courtesy of skin and hair flying. The absentees sometimes took as long as a fortnight off and would then turn up for 2 or 3 days in the third week to indicate that they were still at school. This was the majority practice but there was one family that broke all the rules. They only attended for a few weeks each term and their appearance aroused as much excitement as a visit from a travelling magician. They were big, fat, easy-going boys whose mother was dead and whose father couldn't or wouldn't see the importance of education. The priest could not but have been pleased to have nabbed one of them on one of his visits – it was like catching a goldfinch in a bird crib instead of the expected thrush. "Say the Apostles Creed", says he: This was regarded as a hard prayer for third class even for the regular attenders. Nothing daunted, the lad launched in: "I believe in the God, the father Almighty – Blessed John the Bastard, the Holy Apostles Peter and Piper . . ." "Stop, stop you heathen", shouted the priest and, grabbing his hat, he banged the door behind him.

It was a mixed school and, as was natural amongst the ten and eleven years olds, there was a certain amount of sexual play and activity. This generally took the form of 3 or 4 seducers ramming one of the attractive girls in the school against a wall and making a half-hearted attempt to pull off her knickers while she squealed, half in pleasure and half in mock anger. As they usually ran off if they seemed capable of succeeding – nothing of any consequence ever followed. There was one occasion however when a young one who was a bit of a teaser and a brat succeeded in having her knickers ripped off and then being dunked in a dyke of water. There was a great outcry from her mother and the priest visited the school to deal with the strippers. His finest hour as the guardian of the sexual morals of the youth came when three school-going couples were reported as experimenting in love-making in a haybarn. They had been 'carring on' for some time and there was a general expression of scandal and revulsion amongst Legionaires and religious people in the parish. The priest visited the school and the parents' houses and the love affairs ended.

The curate was after some years transferred to a parish in the lowlands. One Sunday he launched an attack on those standing around the porch and front door and reprimanded an old man kneeling at the door: – "Get up out of there you ould thief", he said. The man went to his solicitor and the priest on the advice of his bishop began to curb his tongue. However his record as a collector for church funds won in the little mountainy parish stood to him for he was later appointed to an office, as chief collector of monies for the diocese. He has been the parish priest in one of the biggest parishes in the Limerick diocese for a number of years. His story is not untypical of many Irish priests. Did someone say something about the wages of fear?

THE PARK DANES

MARRIAGE AND DEATH

To the young man digging in the fields the sight of a stately, swaying girl as she glided past with a pail of milk balanced on her head, must have been a pleasant one. But living at subsistence level, as he did, the Parkman could ill-afford the luxury of romance, even if he had the opportunity. Marriages were contracted strictly on an economic basis. Matches were made between the different families so that the little farms could be held and enlarged where possible. A taciturn Parkman, giving the reason for this intermarriage, summed it up by saying: "Only the Park people know their business". This meant that the system of intensive cultivation was developed so intricately over the centuries and was so dependent for its success on both parties in the marriage that partnership with an outsider could result in economic disaster.

It was common practice for one set of sons and daughters to marry another set from a neighbouring family. Dr. George Butler, the Roman Catholic Bishop of Limerick from 1864 to 1886, fought a long but unsuccessful battle against the intermarriage of the Park people. He eventually gave up the struggle and is reported to have concluded in exasperation: "Build a wall around Park and marry them all inside in it!"

The inbreeding resulted in some congenital oddities and abnormalities amongst the community and gave the Park people a reputation for eccentricity and strangeness. A transgression of the laws of consanguinity resulted in an embarrassing experience for at least one couple about to get married. A Parkman told this story of his wedding to his cousin:

I was to be married in St. Patrick's Church on the morning of the first day the "New Time" came into effect. Because of this confusion I arrived at the church well over an hour before the wedding Mass was due to start. The parish priest was already in the church preparing the altar and, as I came near the church door, I was met by one of my neighbours who said, 'He'll kill you', meaning that the priest was about to attack me. As I approached the altar, the priest turned on me and angrily shouted: 'I can't marry you; you'll have to see the Bishop!' I set off in the horse and cart for the Bishop's Palace in Corbally. I passed my future wife on the way to the church and waved to her across Clare Street. At the Palace the butler opened the door to me and he told my story to Bishop O'Dwyer. The Bishop remained inside but called out to me: 'Tell him to marry you. All Park people have a special dispensation from the Pope to marry their cousins'. I rushed back to the church, told the priest, and got married.

Limerick people have often wondered about the special privilege of intermarriage conferred on the Park community. Did the Catholic Church wish to protect this loyal and pious enclave from being infiltrated by less devout "outsiders?" Or perhaps there is a simpler reason for the Church's attitude. It seems likely that the Church, having failed to discourage the intermarriage, quietly decided to turn a blind eye to the practise.

There was little time or money for leisure but a wedding was a cause for a grand celebration. The Park people dressed up in their Sunday best and set off for the gala occasion. After the customary feasting at the bride's home, a fleets of jarvey cars were hired and the whole party drove around the city to the good-humoured amusement of the populace. The celebration went on right through the day. The guests crowded into the bride's house, the women taking their places in the kitchen and the men being confined to an outhouse. The men refreshed themselves from a barrel of porter and the more

adventurous of the women sipped "a drop" of sherry. When a place became vacant in the kitchen a man would leave the outhouse to join the women. Two well-known balladeers, Martin Kennedy, the wandering Blacksmith of Broadford and Tom "Mausie" Glynn from Thomondgate, were regular visitors on these occasions. Mike Clancy, the Park match-maker, presided benevolently over the festivities, well content with his handiwork.

But not all Park wedding ceremonies were harmonious. The old rigid rule about marrying within the community was strictly enforced up to recent times. For a young person to defy this convention by going outside the fold for a partner, the consequences could be drastic. The few reckless spirits who followed the lure of love outside the Park boundaries were invariably ostracised. Over fifty years ago, an Athlunkard Street boy got a grand stand view of the explosive tribal tensions generated by such a wedding. As the guests began to leave St. Mary's Church after the ceremony, the storm broke. This was to be a marriage celebration with a difference. The lad watched spellbound as the rival families clashed in a wild melee, with fists and boots working overtime. Later the bewildered boy's father explained to him that the ructions were caused by the Park girl "marrying out".

When a death occurred, a wake lasting two days would be held. The dead person had to be decently waked and the occasion was an important event in the life of the people. Many stories are told about Park wakes, and the Limerick poet, Desmond O'Grady, tells one of the best of these funereal tales. About forty years ago, three young Limerick lasses, Annie Bourke, who later married Leonard O'Grady, Nellie Cross, who became the wife of the legendary horsedealer and coachmaker, Dick Hynes, and May Kiely, who, years afterwards was well known as a barmaid in the city's leading hotels, decided to go to a Park wake. Let Desmond O'Grady take up the story:

There was a Cross dead up there in Park and a wake was on. In those days the traditional wake was still a basic element of our culture - although it no longer went as far as it did in previous generations with the dancing of the corpse around the room at the height of the funeral party.

Three girls, pals, Annie Bourke, May Kiely and Nellie Cross - a relation of the dead person - went for the whack th the wake: three wild women of the future, one to marry a horsedealer, another to mother a poet, and the third - the only one living - was never to marry but is still caring for her aged mother. So after the openers - shake of the hand, a kneeling prayer by the corpse stretched there on the bed and the parting glass for the migrating soul - the girls settled in.

After the reverend quiet had been faithfully observed and the fiddle taken down from the wall for the lament, the lilt, the slip-jig, the glasses filled and refilled and the girls no longer lamenting but now laughing and lepping, Anne Bourke - who, could not take a drop without ending up outside in the yard singing in competition with the thrushes - Annie Bourke, niece of Feathery Bourke, was high as a seagull and fell from, excited exhaustion, asleep. So they lifted her gently into the room and put her to bed.

But, as was the way in that day, with the Danish houses of Park, there was only the one good bed, as in medieval times. So into the bed beside the corpse they laid Annie Feathery Bourke and on went with the traditional tramps of the wake party. Annie slept soundly and serenely. The wake waxed wildly, as the whiskey was washed down. Wash and wax . . .

(continued on Page 7)